

To: Appropriations Committee

Date: February 27, 2023

RE: Bill HB06992 - Arts, Culture and Tourism Roadmap

I am Debra Mecky, Executive Director & CEO of Greenwich Historical Society and a 27-year resident of Cos Cob, CT. I thank the members of the Appropriations Committee for their work and dedication. I am here to provide public input on the Governor's proposed FY25 budget for Conservation and Development Agencies.

In particular, I am here to voice my support for the Arts, Culture and Tourism Roadmap that makes the compelling case why \$58.5 million is required to ensure that the investment made in this sector over the past few years—a sector that represents more than 1,000 organizations--is not wasted.

The governor proposes to go backwards to the 2019 pre-pandemic funding level, and perhaps there that seems reasonable to some. But the 2019 funding level was historically low, less than 58% of the per capita investment in arts and culture compared to Massachusetts, and significantly lower than our neighbors in Rhode Island and New York.

The Connecticut Arts alliance, Connecticut Humanities and Connecticut Tourism Coalition worked together on the **Arts, Culture and Tourism Funding Roadmap** in order to offer a reliable, equitable and accountable investment in these important contributors to the state's economy and workforce. Please listen to them.

Greenwich Historical Society is located on the Connecticut/New York border and serves over 12,000 residents and visitors annually of which approximately 25% come from the tristate metropolitan region and 3,000 are children enrolled in our education programs. Our site features the National Historic Landmark Bush-Holley House, site of the first art colony in Connecticut, once a cradle of American Impressionism. Our organization employs two dozen people, and our research, exhibitions and public programs contribute to the state's economy and workforce. Through our tours and public programs, we support Connecticut's tourism, especially those associated with the CT Art Trail and the National Trust's Historic Artists and Studios initiatives.

By providing consistent funding, the CT Cultural Fund and its Operating Support grants for the first time helped organizations like the Greenwich Historical Society enact long range plans and attract additional contributions.

These operating grants allowed us to maintain staff and programs and expand our menu of free and low-cost educational programs and community events. We were able to offer free programs to our area's Title I schools, and to develop new programs and partnerships with local community organizations to reach a broader, more diverse audience, particularly among Asian, South Asian and Latino/a communities which represent Greenwich's fastest growing populations, according to the most recent census. A recent example made possible by our current CT Cultural Fund Operating Grant is *My Story, Our Future*, a project of Greenwich Historical Society in partnership with India Cultural Center and the Asian American Studies Institute at UConn to create oral histories and a student-curated exhibit and provide online resources to support the state's mandated K-12 Asian American/Pacific Islander curriculum. During Black History month, the grant permitted us to dedicated staff time to assist an emerging filmmaker produce a documentary on Worthy Patterson, UConn's first Black NBA player, which will be widely distributed. Time does not permit to tell you the many ways this funding provided value to residents and a return on the investment by attracting visitors from neighboring communities in New York.

I sincerely thank the Appropriations Committee, but ask you to consider that the Governor's budget is insufficient to invest in this important sector or to build on the growth made by our arts, culture and tourism partners over the past few years. I urge you to restore funding at the \$58.5 million level proposed by the Roadmap.